

**STRONGMEN-POLITICIANS AND STRATEGIES OF DOMINATION:
POLITICS AMONG THE MUSLIM BUMIPUTERA IN SARAWAK, 1970-2006**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION AND GLOSSARY

ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia
AFO	Area Farmers' Organization
APU	Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah
ASPA	Ancient Sarawak Politico-Cultural Area
AZAM	Angkatan Zaman Mansang
<i>Bahasa Melayu</i>	Malay language
BARJASA	Parti Barisan Anak Jati Sarawak
BERJASA	Barisan Jamaah Islamiah SeMalaysia
BDA	Bintulu Development Authority
BERASA	Parti Bersatu Rakyat Jelata Sarawak
<i>bilek</i>	household
BINA	Angkatan Nahdatul Islam Bersatu
BMA	British Military Administration
BN	Barisan Nasional
<i>bomohism</i>	shamanism
BPA	Brunei Politico-Cultural Area
BRIMAS	Borneo Research Institute
Bumiputera	Parti Bumiputera Sarawak
<i>ceramah</i>	public speech
CHMS	Chung Hua Middle School
CMSB	Cahaya Mata Sarawak Berhad
CWC	Central Working Committee
DAP	Democratic Action Party
EC	Election Commission
EPU	Economic Planning Unit
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Gerakan	Parti Gerakan Malaysia
HIKMAH	Harakah Islamiah
IADP	Integrated Agriculture Development Program
IGC	Inter-Governmental Committee
IUM	International Islamic University of Malaysia
IKIM	Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia
ISA	Internal Security Act
ISTAC	International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization
JAIS	Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak
<i>jajahan</i>	district
JAKIM	Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia
JKKK	Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung
JPUNS	Jawatankuasa Penaja UMNO Negeri Sarawak
Keadilan	Parti Keadilan Malaysia
KEMAS	Jabatan Kemajuan Masyarakat
LCDA	Land Consolidation Development Authority
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
MARA	Majlis Amanah Rakyat
MAS	Malaysian Airline System
MENGOS	Malaysia Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations
MIDA	Malaysian Industrial Development Authority
MISC	Malaysian International Shipping Corporation
MNU	Malay National Union
MP	Member of Parliament
MRCS	Malaysia Red Crescent Society

MRP	Minor Rural Project
MSE	Malaysia Shipyard and Engineering Berhad
NAFAS	National Farmers Organization
<i>naik pangkat</i>	promotion
NDP	New Development Policy
NEGARA	Parti Negara Rakyat Sarawak
<i>negeri</i>	state
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NVP	National Vision Policy
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
PAJAR	Parti Anak Jati Sarawak
PANAS	Parti Negara Sarawak
PARAKU	Pasokan Rakyat Kalimantan Utara
PAS	Parti Islam SeMalaysia
PBB	Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu
PBDS	Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak
PELITA	Lembaga Pembangunan dan Lindungan Tanah
<i>perintah</i>	government
PERKATA	Persatuan Kanak-Kanak Terencat Akal
PERKIM	Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia
PERMAS	Parti Persatuan Rakyat Malaysia Sarawak
PERNAS	Perbadanan Nasional Berhad
PESAKA	Parti Pesaka Anak Sarawak
PETRONAS	Petroleum Nasional Berhad
PIMU	Project Implementation Monitoring Unit
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat
POD	Politics of Development
PPP	People's Progressive Party
PRB	Parti Rakyat Brunei
PRS	Parti Rakyat Sarawak
PRM	Parti Rakyat Malaysia
RASCOM	Rejang Area Security Command
RELA	Ikatan Relawan Malaysia
<i>reformasi</i>	reform
RES	Rural Electricity Scheme
RHB	Rashid Hussein Bank
RISDA	Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority
RISEAP	Regional Islamic Organization of South East Asia and Pacific
RM	Ringgit Malaysia
RPR	Rancangan Perumahan Rakyat
RTM	Radio Televisyen Malaysia
RGC	Rural Growth Centre
SALCRA	Sarawak Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority
SAPO	Sarawak People's Party
SBN	Sarawak Barisan Nasional
SCA	Sarawak Chinese Association
SDA	Sarawak Dayak Association
SDI	Sarawak Development Institute
SEDC	State Economic Development Corporation
<i>semangat</i>	spirit of life
SNAP	Sarawak National Party
SPA	Sabah-Sulu Politico-Cultural Area
SPDP	Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party
SPrU	Special Project Unit

SPU	State Planning Unit
STAR	State Reform Party
STU	Sarawak Teachers Union
SUCA	Sarawak United Chinese Association
SUPP	Sarawak United People's Party
<i>surau</i>	house of prayer
TGM	Triennial General Meeting
TM	Telekom Malaysia
TNB	Tenaga Nasional Berhad
UDA	Urban Development Authority
UMNO	United Malay National Organization
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
USNA	United Sarawak Natives Association
WARISAN	Parti Warisan Pribumi Sarawak
<i>wazir</i>	minister

ORANG KUAT-POLITIK DAN STRATEGI PENDOMINASIAN: POLITIK BUMIPUTERA ISLAM DI SARAWAK, 1970-2006

ABSTRAK

Menerusi pengaplikasian teori “negara-dalam-masyarakat” yang diketengahkan oleh Joel Migdal (1988), tesis ini mengkaji pendominasi masyarakat Bumiputera Islam di Sarawak sejak lebih tiga dekad yang lalu. Dengan menggunakan beberapa metod kajian seperti analisis kandungan, temubual dan survei, tesis yang mengandungi lapan bab ini distrukturkan mengikut tiga peringkat analisis yang berbeza iaitu nasional, wilayah dan komuniti. Peringkat analisis yang pertama mengupas senario politik di Sarawak dalam konteks politik nasional. Berdasarkan analisis ini, agenda negara untuk mendominasi masyarakat Sarawak terutamanya masyarakat Bumiputera Islam berjaya dicapai melalui strategi akomodasi yang digunakannya. Strategi ini menuntut negara menjadikan kekuatan sosial, golongan inteligensia Bumiputera Islam, di Sarawak sebagai alat untuk melebarkan kuasanya ke negeri ini. Peringkat analisis yang kedua pula memfokus terhadap permainan politik di peringkat negeri. Di sini, tesis mendapati bahawa peranan dualisme yang dimainkan oleh golongan inteligensia, sebagai wakil negara pusat dan “orang kuat-politik”, adalah efektif dalam mendominasi masyarakat Sarawak terutamanya masyarakat Bumiputera Islam. Sebagai wakil negara pusat, “orang kuat-politik” mematuhi lima permintaan dasar pemimpin negara iaitu memelihara kepentingan nasional, mengekalkan dominasi politik Melayu, memastikan dominasi BN dalam pilihan raya, menyerahkan kuasa mengekstrak sumber asli negeri kepada negara pusat dan memelihara kestabilan politik. Sebagai balasan, negara pusat menyerahkan sedikit kuasa autonomi kepada “orang kuat-politik” untuk mentadbir Sarawak. Walaupun kepimpinan “orang kuat-politik” disokong oleh negara pusat, mereka tetap menghadapi pelbagai cabaran dalam mendominasi masyarakat Sarawak

termasuklah kelompok Bumiputera Islam. Justeru, “orang kuat-politik” menggunakan kombinasi pendekatan bersifat represif (menggunakan undang-undang bersifat represif seperti ISA, mengancam untuk memecat pegawai kerajaan yang bersimpati dengan pembangkang, melemahkan parti komponen BN Sarawak yang lain melalui dasar pecah dan perintah) dan akomodatif (mengko-optasi wakil rakyat pembangkang, mengagihkan lesen balak dan sumber negara lain untuk tujuan penaungan, menyatupadukan masyarakat Bumiputera Islam melalui proses Islamisasi, mengeksploitasi perkhidmatan awam Sarawak sebagai instrumen kawalan) yang terbukti berkesan dalam mendominasi masyarakat Bumiputera Islam. Akhir sekali, peringkat analisis yang ketiga memfokus kepada strategi negara dalam mendominasi masyarakat Melayu pesisir di Barat Daya Sarawak. Kajian kes ini bertujuan untuk menguatkan lagi pemahaman umum mengenai peranan negara dan masyarakat dalam membawa kepada pendominasian masyarakat Bumiputera Islam di Sarawak.

**STRONGMEN-POLITICIANS AND STRATEGIES OF DOMINATION:
POLITICS AMONG THE MUSLIM BUMIPUTERA IN SARAWAK, 1970-2006**

ABSTRACT

By applying the “state-in-society” theory that was developed by Joel Migdal (1988), this thesis analyzes the domination of the Muslim Bumiputera in Sarawak since more than three decades ago. Utilizing several research methods, namely content analysis, interviews and survey, this thesis with a total of eight chapters is structured according to three level of analysis; national, regional and community. The first level of analysis attempts to locate Sarawak politics within the larger context of Malaysia’s political system. In this analysis, it is argued that the central state’s agenda of dominating Sarawak’s society in particular the Muslim Bumiputera has been made possible through its use of the accommodative strategy. At the crux of this strategy is the co-optation of Sarawak’s social forces, the Muslim Bumiputera intelligentsia, who have become the central state’s tool of domination in the *negeri*. The second level of analysis focuses on the inter-play of Sarawak politics at the *negeri* level. This thesis argues that the dual roles played by the Muslim Bumiputera intelligentsia, as the central state’s representative and as local strongman-politician, have effectively contributed to the central state’s agenda of dominating Sarawak’s society, in particular the Muslim Bumiputera. In playing the role of a state representative, strongmen-politicians religiously abide to five basic demands of the state leaders; safeguarding national interest, maintaining Malay political dominance, ensuring the BN’s continued dominance in the elections, granting the right to extract Sarawak’s natural resources to the central state and providing political stability. In return, the central state accords a certain degree of autonomy to strongmen-politicians in administering the *negeri*. Although the leadership of strongmen-politicians received the endorsement of central

state leaders, they still faced great difficulties in dominating the people of Sarawak including the Muslim Bumiputera. Hence, the strongmen-politicians employed a combination of repressive (using repressive laws such as the ISA, issuing threat of expulsion against dissenting government officers, weakening the strength of SBN component parties through the policy of divide and rule) and accommodative measures (co-opting opposition assemblymen, dispersing timber licenses and other state resources as a mean of patronage, unifying the heterogeneous Muslim Bumiputera through the process of Islamisation, penetrating the community through Sarawak civil service) which proved to be effective in dominating the Muslim Bumiputera. Finally, the third level of analysis discusses the strategies adopted by the state in dominating the coastal Malays in South-West Sarawak. This case study aims to reinforce our understanding of the roles played by the state and society in leading to the political domination of the Muslim Bumiputera in Sarawak.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

By applying the “state-in-society” theory, this thesis aims to examine the state’s strategies in dominating¹ the Muslim Bumiputera² in Sarawak since 1970 to 2006. The state’s domination of the Muslim Bumiputera is largely manifested in the ruling party’s (BN) continued success in wresting control of the Muslim Bumiputera seats³ since the first direct election in 1970 to the most recent *negeri*⁴ election in 2006. Initially, the ruling party faced an uphill battle in cajoling Sarawak’s electorate including the Muslim Bumiputera as evident from its dismal performance in the 1970 election; it only won nine parliamentary seats and less than half of the Council Negeri seats. Despite this overall setback, the ruling party was able to secure all the Muslim Bumiputera seats although its popular vote in these constituencies was less than 48 percent. The ruling party only began to impose its dominance over the Muslim Bumiputera electorate in the following 1974 election when it drastically increased its popular vote to 68.2 percent. After the 1974 election, the ruling party consistently recorded between 68 to 82 percent of the Muslim Bumiputera vote, except in the 1987 election which saw the party losing three Muslim Bumiputera seats. The historic resistance of the Muslim Bumiputera electorate (along with the non-Muslim Bumiputera) was quickly subdued by the ruling party in the following 1990 election when the party increased the Muslim Bumiputera vote from 59.5 percent in 1987 to 74.7 percent in 1990. The consolidation of the Muslim Bumiputera was completed in the 1991 election when the ruling party managed to win back the three seats that it lost in 1987, and increased its overall popular vote in other Muslim Bumiputera seats. In the 1995 election, the Muslim Bumiputera’s support

towards the ruling party reached an all-time high of 82.8 percent, the highest percentage of popular vote received by the ruling party in the history of elections in Sarawak. The BN's overall popularity declined quite significantly in the hotly contested 1999 election but it did little in breaking the party's stranglehold over the Muslim Bumiputera electorate. The eroding Muslim Bumiputera's support towards the BN was quickly reconsolidated in the 2001 election when the party increased its popular vote from 68.7 percent in 1999 to 77.2 percent in 2001. The support of the Muslim Bumiputera towards the ruling party continued to escalate in 2004, leading to a record 82.7 percent of the popular vote. Although there was a slight decline in the BN's popularity in the subsequent 2006 election, it was not enough to erode the ruling party's grip over the Muslim Bumiputera electorate as evident from its capability to retain all 26 Muslim Bumiputera seats, including five newly created seats.

Table 1.1: BN's Performance in Sarawak Parliamentary Elections, 1970-2004

	1970	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1995	1999	2004
Number of seats won by the BN	9 (24)	15 (24)	23 (24)	19 (24)	21 (24)	21 (27)	26 (27)	28 (28)	27 (28)
Percentage of the BN's popular vote	34.6	62	63.0	56.8	55.6	57.1	63.6	65.9	65.8
Number of seats won by the BN in the Muslim Bumiputera seats	5 {5}	5 {5}	5 {5}	5 {5}	5 {5}	7 {7}	8 {8}	7 {7}	7 {7}
Percentage of the BN's popular vote in the Muslim Bumiputera seats	48.0	68.2	68.4	77.6	68.2	74.7	82.8	68.7	82.8

Notes:

1. Figures in () represent the total number of parliamentary seats in Sarawak.
2. Figures in { } represent the total number of Muslim Bumiputera seats in Sarawak.

Sources: Adapted from Searle (1983, p.219-225), Leigh (1974, p.136-137), Election Commission Malaysia (1975, p.63-67), (1980, p.86-89), (1983, p.85-87), (1988a, p.82-83), (1992, p.152-155), (1997, p.173-174), (2002, p.124-126) and (2006, p.190-194)

Table 1.2: BN's Performance in Council Negeri Elections, 1970-2006

	1970	1974	1979	1983	1987	1991	1996	2001	2006
Number of seats won by SBN	23 (48)	30 (48)	45 (48)	34 (48)	28 (48)	49 (56)	57 (62)	60 (62)	62 (71)
Percentage of the BN's popular vote	39	55	61.2	68.5	55.2	62.8	66.6	71.2	62.9
Number of seats won by the BN in the Muslim Bumiputera seats	11 {11}	11 {11}	12 {12}	12 {12}	9 {12}	17 {17}	22 {22}	21 {21}	26 {26}
Percentage of the BN's popular vote in the Muslim Bumiputera seats	47.3	70.3	77.2	67.6	59.5	74.5	77.7	77.2	75.3

Notes:

1. Figures in () represent the total number of Council Negeri seats in Sarawak.

2. Figures in { } represent the total number of Muslim Bumiputera seats in Sarawak.

Sources: Adapted from Searle (1983, p.219-225), Leigh (1974, p.136-137), Election Commission Malaysia (1985, p.36-42), (1988b, p.40-45), (1993, p.67-78), (1999, p.92-111) and (2004a, p.85-97)

In summary, the ruling party in Sarawak had persistently maintained its dominance in the Council Negeri by securing more than two-third seats in the *negeri*'s legislative body. Meanwhile, in the parliamentary elections, the ruling party constantly delivered more than 78 percent of the seats (except in the 1970 and 1974 elections) which tremendously boosted the national ruling party's dominance in parliament. Without a doubt, the ruling party has shown great capabilities in cajoling Sarawak's electorate but its dominance is more prevalent among the Muslim Bumiputera. Throughout Sarawak elections, the ruling party consistently made a total sweep of the Muslim Bumiputera seats (except in the 1987 election) and recorded a higher percentage of the popular vote in these seats, compared to the party's overall percentage of the popular vote. The political domination of the Muslim Bumiputera has been the main feature of the community's politics for more than three decades.

Unfortunately, the political domination of the Muslim Bumiputera has not been adequately addressed by the existing literature which leads to the inception of this

thesis. In analyzing this political phenomenon, this thesis argues that the political domination of the Muslim Bumiputera is achieved through the state's strategy in accommodating social forces in Sarawak. These co-opted social forces would then act as the medium to extend the central state's domination of Sarawak's society including the Muslim Bumiputera. Hence, the juncture between the state and social forces in Sarawak becomes the basis of domination in the *negeri* particularly among the Muslim Bumiputera since the last three decades. This argument is the central tenet of the "state-in-society" theory which becomes the theoretical framework of this thesis.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Developed by Joel Migdal (1988, 2001), the "state-in-society" theory is an anti-thesis to the argument presented by many state theorists such as Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (1985) who published a highly acclaimed book entitled *Bringing the State Back In*. In their argument, Evans et. al. (1985) and other state theorists argue that states have enormous capacity to transform their societies which seemed powerless against the might of these powerful institutions. Migdal (1988, p.17), however, argues that when the capacity of the state is over-emphasized, we tend to assume that 'states in all time and places have had a similar potential or ability to achieve their leaders' intentions', leading us to ignore the fact that states have played varying roles in different societies. Although Migdal criticizes the concept of state presented by many state theorists, he still believes that this dominant institution has important roles in affecting order and change in society. He, however, opines that the state power should not be overly emphasized because society, especially social forces,

also has the capabilities to affect order and change. This second argument sets Migdal apart from other state theorists like Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol (1985).

The state, according to Migdal (2001, p.16), represents ‘the image of coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory, and the actual practices of its multiple parts’. There are two components in Migdal’s definition of the state, namely the state’s image and its practices. The state’s image represents the people’s (whether inside or outside the state) perception of its power. In general, the state has an image of a coherent organization which has the ability to control the people within its boundary. This image is then influenced by the state’s practices which refer to the actual actions taken by different components of the state. The state’s practices could either strengthen its pre-conceived image or deconstruct it. In this context, the state is not necessarily strong and dominant because the actual actions of the state could prove otherwise. Another distinctive aspect of Migdal’s definition of the state is his emphasis on the state’s dynamism and fluidity which is determined by the interactions between state actors (political leaders, state secretary, chief secretaries, heads of departments, senior officers, junior officers, ground officials) in the state’s “multiple parts” (ministries, departments, units, sections). This distinctive definition of the state becomes the basis of Migdal’s “state-in-society” theory⁵.

Prior to the birth of the “state-in-society” theory, there were other scholars who used state-society approaches in analyzing order and change in society. One of the most notable state-society theorists is Edward Shils (1975), an American sociologist, who published the influential book entitled *Center and Periphery*. According to Shils (1975),

the center which constitutes the dominant values, beliefs, institutions and elites would impose its authority over the periphery which possesses dissenting value system. Although Shils integrated an analysis of society in his study, he still viewed it as a passive actor in a system with a domineering center. In fact, Shils argues that post-colonial societies in Asia and Africa which do not have strong centers are considered to be protosocieties; a euro-centric view of society held by the much criticized modernization theorists. With this theoretical flaw, the center-periphery model could not be used to adequately explain political order and change that is taking place in post-colonial states. The “state-in-society” theory attempts to enhance the argument put forward by the center-periphery model by first of all discarding the modernist’s perspective, then rejecting the dichotomous model of society and thirdly by amplifying the role of the periphery in affecting order and change in society. This leads us to a discussion of the fundamental tenets of Migdal’s “state-in-society” theory. Here, I will present three basic principles of the theory; (1) the state is a social organization that is embedded in society; (2) social forces have the capacity to resist state’s power; and (3) the juncture between the state and social forces would inevitably lead to order and change not only in society but also the state.

First, the “state-in-society” theory rejects the idea that the state is an entity separate from society. The state, according to Migdal (1988, p.28), is one of the social organizations which represent a mixture of interests in society such as families, clubs and clans. Social organizations including the state would formulate various rules and regulations in order to control the behavior of their members and also their interaction with members from other organizations. To achieve compliance among their members, social organizations would offer various incentives (security, status, monetary

assistance) and when necessary use different form of threats (punishment, imprisonment, physical force). The capability of social organizations to achieve compliance among their members is termed “social control”⁶. According to Migdal (1988, p.29), the state as other social organizations alike would compete with each other to achieve “social control” which then leads to conflict. However, not all social organizations have the capacity to compete with the state because only those influential and powerful forces could do it.

Second, there are influential and powerful social organizations known as social forces which have the capacity to challenge the state especially in its attempt to dominate society. In many post-colonial states, leaders of social forces such as village heads, land lords, tribal chiefs, urban caciques, rich peasants or intelligentsia who could pose a strong challenge to the state. With their influence and wealth, leaders of social forces, also known as strongmen, have the abilities to form a network of clients or entourages who become the basis of their power. The bigger their network of clients, the more powerful strongmen would become. Hence, states would have great difficulty in dominating society if strongmen call on their clients or entourages to boycott states’ policies and programs. As a result, the state would be deemed ineffective and weak which could lead to its collapse. Apart from strongmen, other form of social forces such as the middle class, ethno-religious groups, business organizations, NGOs and social movements could also pose formidable challenges to the state. These social forces could use various resources available to them to articulate public interests which could be in conflict with the state. The active roles played by social forces prove that society is not merely a subject of the state’s domination. On the contrary, social forces can resist the state’s power in order to dictate its own future.

Third, the capacity of social forces to resist the state's power would inevitably lead to a constant struggle between social forces and the state over the right to achieve "social control". As the biggest and usually the most powerful social organization, the state could impose its authority over all social relations within its boundary. Social forces, on the other hand, could either submit to the state's domination or resist it. If social forces opt to take the second option, this will create conflict between the state and social forces which takes place in various arenas of society such as the distribution of state's resources, the struggle for political power, and the freedom to exercise one's fundamental rights. In addressing this conflict, the state could ignore the social forces and impose repressive or coercive measures to subdue them which could lead to the deterioration of the conflict. Or it could compromise with the social forces, leading to a delicate co-existence between the state and social forces. This compromise is achieved through a variety of accommodative strategies such as the co-optation of strongmen, the creation of multiple networks of clients, and the widespread practice of corruption. Accommodation is, therefore, a situation where 'no single group – not the implementers, not the local politicians, and not the strongmen – monopolizes power' (Migdal 2001, p.90). This accommodation will later become the catalyst for order and change in society.

The "state-in-society" theory is not a "grand substantive" theory, like the "modernization theory", which imposes a uni-centric perspective in explaining order and change in society. It rather proposes a broad analytical framework to study post-colonial states which are based on the three basic principles discussed earlier. In a nutshell, the "state-in-society" theory views the convergence of the state and social forces as the source of order and change in society. In many post-colonial states, social

forces are very powerful that their existence leads to the weakening of the states. In order to maintain their survival, these weak states would accommodate the social forces so as to neutralize them hence preventing their collapse. On the other hand, in strong states, society is generally considered weak but there are instances where the states' authority could still be contested. Whether in strong or weak states, both states and social forces have important roles in affecting order and change through their constant struggle over various arenas in society. This broad analytical framework is useful to analyze the political domination of the Muslim Bumiputera in Sarawak since more than three decades ago.

1.3 HYPOTHESIS

Applying the “state-in-society” theory, this thesis argues that the political domination of the Muslim Bumiputera in Sarawak is attributable to the state's capture of social forces in the *negeri*. In capturing Sarawak's social forces, the state co-opts influential Muslim Bumiputera intelligentsia who not only act as the state's representative but also as the most influential force in society. Acting on behalf of the state, these Muslim Bumiputera leaders, who are subsequently transformed into strongmen-politicians, would employ various measures, both accommodative and repressive, in order to cajole Sarawak's multi-ethnic society, including the Muslim Bumiputera. The juncture between the state and Muslim Bumiputera strongmen-politicians subsequently leads to the political domination of Sarawak's society particularly the Muslim Bumiputera.

To further examine the argument presented above, three hypotheses which are formulated based on the “state-in-society” theory will be presented. By analyzing these

hypotheses, a structured analysis of the thesis will be constructed and the validity of the theory will be tested. The three hypotheses are;

1. A strong state does not have an overriding power to dominate society.

The strength of a state is measured by its capabilities to achieve the kind of changes that their leaders have sought in society through various policies and programs (Migdal 1988, p.4). To disaggregate the state's strength, Migdal identifies four types of tasks that the state has to perform, namely to penetrate society, to regulate social relations, to extract resources, and to appropriate resources in determined ways. A strong state, therefore, denotes a state with high capabilities to accomplish all these four tasks, whereas a weak state refers to those with low capabilities. Strong states would usually face little resistance in dominating society because of the various resources that they have at their disposal and the sense of legitimacy that society accords them. However, this does not mean that strong states have absolute power and societies are passive actors who merely surrender to the states' domination. This thesis argues that even strong states like Malaysia have limited power, especially in regions or localities which are physically distant from the center of power.

2. When the state accommodates social forces, this strategy results in the consolidation of society towards the state.

Social forces are influential individuals or organizations within society. When the state attempts to dominate society, social forces could either surrender to the state's demand or they could resist it. In a situation where social forces opt for the second option, the state usually utilizes accommodative strategies in order to neutralize their influence and to entice their support. Since the main purpose of accommodating

social forces is to win over the hearts and minds of society, this strategy should therefore lead to the consolidation of society towards the state.

3. The state's accommodative strategies could, overtime, seriously undermine its own authority.

When the state employs accommodative strategies in order to quell social forces, these strategies would not only lead to changes in society but also the state itself. By co-opting strongmen, for example, the state would have to compromise its authority by transferring some of its power to these powerful individuals. Apart from co-opting strongmen, the strategy of accommodation could also include illegal and inefficient practices such as corruption and cronyism which could seriously undermine the state's integrity and capabilities. As a result, the state's agenda, policies or programs could be sidetracked and corrupt practices could become rampant.

1.4 SCOPE OF RESEARCH AND OBJECTIVES

Structurally, this thesis is divided into three level of analysis; national (central state), regional (Sarawak) and community (South West Sarawak Malays). Based on this layered analysis, a better understanding of the state-Muslim Bumiputera relations will be achieved. In terms of the time frame, this thesis focuses on the period between 1970 and 2006. The main reason for emphasizing this period is the absence of any major study on Muslim Bumiputera politics in Sarawak after 1970. Apart from that, 1970 is historically important to Muslim Bumiputera politics because it marked the resurgence of Muslim Bumiputera's political dominance with the appointment of its first Chief

Minister. Hence it would be fitting to frame this thesis from that year onwards. To end this thesis, the most recent held elections in 2006 will be included.

To add clarity on the scope of this study, a brief discussion on its research objectives is essential. Here, four objectives have been identified; (i) to evaluate the strength of the Malaysian state by analyzing its capabilities to penetrate society, to regulate social relations, to extract resources, and to appropriate resources in determined ways; (ii) to identify the social forces in Sarawak and their potential to resist state's power; (iii) to analyze the accommodative strategies employed by the central (federal government) and regional state (Sarawak government) in dominating Sarawak's society, in particular the Muslim Bumiputera; and (iv) to explain the state's domination of the Muslim Bumiputera at the micro level by looking at the coastal Malays in South West Sarawak.

First of all, this thesis aims to evaluate the strength of Malaysian state by assessing its capabilities to perform four tasks, namely to penetrate society, to regulate social relations, to extract resources and to appropriate resources. This is the first level of analysis (national analysis) which frames Sarawak politics within the context of Malaysian politics. By analyzing the capabilities of the state, we would be able to determine whether Malaysia is a strong or weak state. This will provide the basis of our understanding of the state capabilities in dominating society in Sarawak, in particular the Muslim Bumiputera.

Second, this thesis intends to identify social forces in Sarawak and their potential to resist the state's power. Social forces represent various associative groups

that have the ability and resources to acquire “social control”. By identifying these social forces, we would be able to understand the limits of state power in Sarawak. On top of that, the analysis on social forces in Sarawak allows us to realize the importance of society in generating order and change in the *negeri*.

Third, this thesis analyzes the accommodative strategies employed by the central state (federal government) and the regional state (Sarawak government) in dominating society in Sarawak, in particular the Muslim Bumiputera. Since Malaysia is a federal system, the structure of the state can be divided into two, namely the central state (federal government) and regional state (*negeri* government). Within the federal system, the central and regional states both play important roles in affecting order and change in society. Hence, in studying the political domination of the Muslim Bumiputera in Sarawak, this thesis will analyze it from both central and regional state’s perspectives.

Fourth, this thesis aims to explain the state’s domination of the Muslim Bumiputera at the micro level by studying the coastal Malays in South West Sarawak. This case study which constitutes a community level analysis will help us to better understand the state’s domination of the Muslim Bumiputera community, and the latter’s response towards it. Apart from that, the community level analysis will provide us with more insights into Sarawak Muslim Bumiputera politics as a whole.

1.5 RESEARCH METHOD

The complexities in analyzing the state-society relations in Sarawak require the use of both quantitative and qualitative techniques, known as mixed research, as the tool to answer the research question posed in this thesis. In analyzing the strength of the

state, both qualitative and quantitative data are required to gauge the capabilities of the state. Most of the qualitative data are extracted from the existing literature (books, journals) on the state while the quantitative data, especially on the economy and population, can be obtained from the Statistics Department of Malaysia. The same approach will be applied in identifying the social forces in Sarawak. Apart from relying mostly on qualitative data (books, journals, archival materials), some relevant data from the Statistics Department on the Muslim Bumiputera population in Sarawak will also be utilized.

Since the literature on Muslim Bumiputera politics in Sarawak is quite limited, this thesis has to rely heavily on archival materials such as local newspapers and government documents as the major source of information. These data will be collected, analyzed and then interpreted in order to provide a chronological description of Muslim Bumiputera politics in Sarawak for more than three decades. In analyzing the Muslim Bumiputera's voting trend, this study will use the electoral data published by the Election Commission of Malaysia. Based on these data, a detailed analysis of the voting trend of Sarawak's electorate, especially the Muslim Bumiputera, over the last three decades will be presented. Apart from analyzing significant political events in Muslim Bumiputera politics, the archival materials will also be useful to explain the state's accommodative strategies in dominating society in Sarawak. This is complemented by referring to secondary sources, books and journals, on Sarawak politics and on Muslim Bumiputera politics specifically.

The political analysis on the coastal Malays in South West Sarawak draws from three major studies of the community - Harrisson (1970), Ishikawa (1998) and Halim

Ali et. al. (2006). The studies by Harrisson (1970) and Halim Ali et. al. (2006) are based on extensive surveys of the coastal Malays, aimed at describing the socio-economic profile of the community. Halim Ali et. al. (2006) actually attempts to revisit the Malay community studied by Harrisson (1970) in the 1950s with an emphasis on analyzing the type of change or continuity that the community has experienced for more than five decades (1950-2003). Ishikawa (1998), on the other hand, employs a qualitative approach in studying the marginality, displacement and exclusion of the Malays in South West Sarawak from the nation and state system. In his study, Ishikawa relied on ethnographic approach in analyzing the impact of power play for over a century (1870s-1990s) in South West Sarawak. In this thesis, the survey data from Halim et. al. (2006) will be the major source of reference since it contains the most recent comprehensive data on the community. Apart from that, I was also part of the research team headed by Halim hence a substantial amount of unpublished data on the political culture of the community is available to me. This data is not only extracted from the survey conducted in 2003 but also from a host of interviews held within the same period of time.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a substantial collection of books, articles and monographs on Sarawak politics, encompassing various subjects such as colonial rule, the formation of Malaysia, voting behavior of major ethnic groups, money politics, political patronage and federal-*negeri* relations. Despite this voluminous literature, there is a serious limitation in the study of Muslim Bumiputera politics. Most of the existing studies are confined to analyzing political change that occurred between the colonial and post-Independence period, with an absence of any major study that discusses change after 1970. Although

there are several notable studies on Sarawak politics in the 1980s and 1990s, they focus mainly on the analysis of elections and political conflict. In addition, the theoretical framework used in the existing literature is still trapped within the argument presented by the obsolete modernization and neo-modernization theory. This thesis therefore intends to fill this literature gap and contribute to the application of new perspective in studying Sarawak politics.

In reviewing the literature on Sarawak politics, a special focus is given to the study of political change in Sarawak especially among the Muslim Bumiputera from the colonial period to the present time. Apart from that, several works that examine Sarawak's socio-economic change within the corresponding period will also be discussed. The study of Sarawak's history, including those focusing on socio-economic-political change, during the Brooke rule dominates the literature on Sarawak politics with the publication of more than forty works related to the subject. Most of these works were written by Brooke's court historians such as Gertrude Jacob (1876), Spenser St. John (1879) and S. Baring-Gould and C.A. Bampfylde (1909). In these writings, the narration of Sarawak's history revolves around the Brookes who were described as "benign rulers" with a mission "to civilize the savage indigenous population" in Sarawak. As the dominant force in Sarawak at that time, the Brookes were portrayed as the single major source of change in 19th century Sarawak while its multi-ethnic society was deemed as dormant. Baring-Gould and Bampfylde's (1909) *History of Sarawak* is one of the most detailed work on the Brooke and the political change in Sarawak during the early 19th century. In this important work, the authors discuss chronologically the Brooke's mission to expand the territorial boundary of Sarawak from the Sarawak (Kuching Division) to the Lawas River System (Limbang Division). This territorial

expansion was the major change in Sarawak after the establishment of Brooke government in 1841. Apart from that, Baring-Gould and Bampfylde also discuss other types of change in Sarawak during the Brooke's rule such as the introduction of free trade, the establishment of mission schools and the spread of Christianity. In amplifying the Brooke's powerful rule, Baring-Gould and Bampfylde (1909) overlook the importance of Malay aristocrats and native chiefs in sustaining colonial rule in Sarawak. Although the authors acknowledge the influence of Malay aristocrats among the local populace, they fail to provide detailed analysis of the Brooke's strategies in winning their support. In fact, most of the earliest work on Sarawak's history lack substantial analysis of Sarawak's society especially their relationship with the Brooke.

In the 1960s, several works that challenge the narrative of Sarawak's early history by the Brooke's court historians started to emerge. This new generation of works does not only provide an alternative perspective of the Brooke but they also contribute towards a shift in the focus of Sarawak's historiography from the Brooke and their administration to the relationship between Brooke and the people that they sought to conquer. One of the important works that emerged within this period is Pringle's (1970) *Rajahs and Rebels*. Pringle's (1970) work appears closely related to this thesis in its approach but it differs markedly in terms of its argument and focus of study. In his highly acclaimed book, Pringle not only discusses the relationship between the Brooke and the biggest ethnic group in Sarawak, the Ibans, but he also challenges the notion that the Brookes were benign rulers. A more recent study of Sarawak's early history which emulates Pringle's approach is *Power and Prowess* by Walker (2002). By combining the new approach in Asian historiography and political science, Walker reconstructs Sarawak's history by analyzing the Brooke's relationship with the local

populace especially the Malays and Dayaks. According to him, the Brooke's source of power did not come from the British military but it came from the people of Sarawak and its rich resources. Walker further argues that in order to acquire the power to rule Sarawak, the Brooke established networks of patron-client which helped them to win the support of the local populace, and to distribute important resources. Another important point raised by Walker is the fragmentation of the Malay strongmen due to their competition for esteemed positions in the Brooke governments. This fragmentation led to conflicts among Brooke's supporters which were not highlighted in previous studies.

Another study which discusses the relationship between the colonial governments and Sarawak's population is Sabihah's (1983) *Malay-Muslim Political Participation in Sarawak and Sabah, 1841-1951*. In her study, Sabihah (1983) focuses on the political role of the Muslim Bumiputera since the establishment of Brooke's rule until the instatement of British colonial rule in Sarawak. Also discussed is the role of colonial governments in curbing the power of the Malay aristocrats who had been in control of Sarawak's political and economic system since the sixteenth century. The political dominance of the Malay aristocrats, according to Sabihah (1983), was made possible by their strategic geographical locality, religion, superior education and higher political consciousness. With the Malay aristocrats' huge influence among the population, the Brooke co-opted them as part of the strategy to rule Sarawak and its people. Although the Brooke government accommodated the Malay aristocrats, it strategically weakened their power so as to curb their influence within the government and also society. This strategy led to the decline of the Malay aristocrats who were subsequently replaced by the Muslim Melanau intelligentsia. As rightly noted by

Sabihah (1983), the appointment of Malay aristocrats as government officials was part of the colonialists' strategy in accommodating the social forces in Sarawak. This point was inadequately addressed by the previous work on Sarawak's early history, hence making Sabihah's (1993) study a valuable contribution to the existing literature.

Apart from the large corpus of Sarawak's history during Brooke's rule, there is also a range of works that discusses political change in Sarawak during the Japanese occupation and the British colonial rule. Among the works that deserve mention here are those by Ooi (1999), Reece (1998) and Sanib (1985). Ooi's (1999) *Rising Sun over Borneo* examines the Japanese occupation in Sarawak and its impact on the *negeri*'s multi-ethnic society. He argues that the systemic changes witnessed in other Southeast Asian societies during the Japanese occupation did not occur in Sarawak. With limited manpower and financial resources, the Japanese army maintained the pre-invasion patterns of political organization and mobilization in Sarawak with the Malay aristocrats playing the lead roles. Complementing Ooi's (1999) work on Sarawak's history during the Japanese occupation is Reece's (1998) *Masa Jepun* which is a social narrative of the wartime years from the perspective of various actors; the European internees; the urban and rural Chinese dwellers; the Malay civil servants and policemen who worked for the Japanese; the Ibans who resented Japanese policies; and the minority Indian community whose loyalties were torn between their new and old masters. Unlike Ooi (1999), Reece (1998) does not discuss the role of the Japanese occupation in generating change in society. Nonetheless, Reece's (1998) work helps to enrich the scant literature on Sarawak politics during the Japanese occupation.

Another important work that analyzes political change after the Brooke's rule is Sanib's (1985) *Malay Politics in Sarawak*. The study by Sanib (1985) is an utmost important to this thesis because it represents the small collection of works that analyze political change among the Muslim Bumiputera in Sarawak. In his book, Sanib (1985) discusses the conflict among the Muslim Bumiputera leaders after the Japanese occupation. He argues that the conflict erupted when the young intelligentsia criticized the Malay aristocrats for failing to protect the interests of the Malays. The tension between the intelligentsia and the Malay aristocrats came to a head after the Japanese occupation due to the last Rajah's decision to cede Sarawak to the British colonial government. The cession controversy aggravated the Muslim Bumiputera schism when the young intelligentsia opposed the cession, while the Malay aristocrats supported it. Even after Malaysia was formed in 1963, the schism among the Muslim Bumiputera elites prevailed, leading to the establishment of two Muslim Bumiputera dominated parties, PANAS (pro-cession) and BARJASA (anti-cession). The split among the Muslim Bumiputera led to the emergence of non-Muslim Bumiputera leaders as the new dominant force in post-Independence Sarawak. The crisis that engulfed the Muslim Bumiputera was finally resolved after the dissolution of PANAS and BARJASA to make way for a new united Muslim Bumiputera dominated party known as Bumiputera in 1966. This political consolidation allowed the Muslim Bumiputera to regain control of Sarawak's government with the help of the central state. Sanib argues that the source of conflict among the Muslim Bumiputera was attributed to the Brooke's policies of according special treatment to the Malay aristocrats while marginalizing the commoners. Paradoxically, the development in education during the Brooke's and the British colonial's rule became the catalyst for the emergence of the Muslim Bumiputera intelligentsia who later challenged the authority of the Malay aristocrats. Unfortunately,

Sanib's (1985) valuable work ends in 1966, the year when the Muslim Bumiputera consolidated themselves politically. Hopefully, this thesis will fill the dearth of academic writings on Muslim Bumiputera politics beyond 1966.

When Sarawak helped to form Malaysia in 1963, this historical event generated a host of works on political change in Sarawak during this momentous period. The central concern of these works is to analyze the implications of Malaysia on Sarawak politics and its people. Among the essential reading for understanding Sarawak politics within this period are the studies by Leigh (1974), Ongkili (1972), Roff (1974), Milne and Ratnam (1974) and Ross-Larson (1972). Since these studies were published almost about the same time in the early 1970s, their scope of analysis did not differ much from each other. However, there is a significant difference in the theoretical argument of these studies with most of them are divided into two schools of thought, one group utilizing modernization theory and the other neo-modernization theory. Leigh's (1974) *The Rising Moon* is the most highly acclaimed work on political change during the post-Independence Sarawak. His approach in studying political change is based on a state-centered perspective with more focus given on political institutions. In terms of the theoretical framework used in his study, Leigh applies the neo-modernization theory which looks at the co-existence of traditional and modern politics. The approach and theory used by Leigh differs markedly from that used in this thesis, but it still contributes immensely to our understanding of politics in post-Independence Sarawak. Leigh (1974) basically analyzes the incorporation of Sarawak into the Malaysian political system and its impact on the local populace. According to Leigh (1974), the central state supported efforts to assert the primacy of racial politics over those based upon shared interest, so that Sarawak would accord with the national pattern. This strategy was imposed on Sarawak because the central state leaders believed that the consociational

model (the concept of power sharing between major ethnic groups) used in the Peninsula had been proven effective in maintaining stability and continued dominance of the ruling party. To subsume Sarawak into the national system, the central state brokered a political alliance which was thought to be supportive of the central state's agenda. However, when the leader of this alliance failed to preserve the national pattern, the central state did not hesitate to replace him with another leader that could uphold the central state's agenda. The removal of Stephen Kalong Ningkan as Sarawak's first Chief Minister illustrated this point. He was subsequently replaced by Tawi Sli but the latter was considered to be an interim leader when the central state took advantage of the constructed instability in Sarawak by appointing the first Muslim Bumiputera Chief Minister, Abdul Rahman Yakub, in 1970. The political ascendancy of the Muslim Bumiputera was therefore the result of the central state's agenda of ensuring the sustainability of the national pattern with the Malays playing a pivotal role. Despite the central state's attempt in imposing racial politics in Sarawak, Leigh argues that the resilience and vitality of multi-ethnic parties in Sarawak had prevented racial politics from subsuming all other issues and becoming the major source of cleavage in society. This thesis agrees with Leigh's contention that the central state played an important role in Sarawak politics especially in appointing Sarawak's first Muslim Bumiputera Chief Minister. However, this thesis will go beyond the analysis of ethnic politics as the source of conflict between the central state and the *negeri* government so that an alternative perspective of Sarawak politics can be pursued.

Contrary to Leigh (1974), Ongkili (1972) applies modernization theory to analyze political change in Sarawak during the formation of Malaysia. In his book entitled *Modernization in East Malaysia*, Ongkili (1972) argues that the process of state

formation had successfully restructured the traditional system of the people in Sarawak and also increased their political consciousness. This led to a crisis of identity among the *negeri* leaders and also the people in general. The removal of Kalong Ningkan represented the manifestation of this crisis because he was staunchly promoting regionalism which contradicted the central state's agenda of promoting nationalism in Sarawak. Ongkili (1972) argues that the power of the state is so overwhelming that it is capable of removing the traditional system and replacing it with a modern construct. Roff's (1974) *The Politics of Belongings* complements the study by Ongkili (1972). According to Roff (1974), the patron-client relation in Sarawak would cease to exist when the political consciousness and participation of the people increased. She further argues that patronage politics in Sarawak would not persist because political leaders do not have the resources to sustain the loyalty of their clients. This modernist view of political change has proven inadequate because it fails to anticipate the continued existence of patronage politics in twenty first century Sarawak.

Milne and Ratnam's (1974) *Malaysia, New States in a New Nation* is another study that discusses political change in post-Independence Sarawak. Compared to all the works discussed earlier, Milne and Ratnam (1974) adopt a more eclectic approach in analyzing Sarawak politics during the formative years of Malaysia. Instead of resorting to modernization theory, they take a broader approach by using three different concepts; namely social mobilization, political stability and institutionalization. In essence, Milne and Ratnam (1974) argue that the rampant practice of money politics and other types of political strategies employed by the state leaders in Sarawak were aimed at mobilizing the electorate behind the ruling party so that stability would be achieved. Although Milne and Ratnam's (1974) work does not have a coherent theoretical analysis, it

provides a useful eclectic view of Sarawak politics. Another major work on political change during the early period of Malaysia is Ross-Larson's (1972) *The Politics of Federalism*. This is an account of Sarawak (and Sabah) politics during the early years of Malaysia from the perspective of Syed Kechik, a Malay lawyer, who was instructed by the central state leadership to act as an arm of federal persuasion in the East Malaysian *negeris*. Ross-Larson's (1972) work is important because he provides the inside scoop of the central state's role in effecting change in Sarawak, in particular the dismissal of Ningkan from his Chief Minister office in 1966.

There is a dearth of studies on political change in Sarawak beyond the post-Independence period. Only a handful of studies have been carried out with most of them taking the perspective of particular ethnic groups. Some of the works worth mentioning here are the studies by Ishikawa (1998), Searle (1983), Jawan (1994) and Chin (1997). Ishikawa's (1998) *The Formation and Marginalization of A Borderland Malay Community in Southwestern Sarawak, Malaysia 1870s-1990s* analyzes the role of state formation in marginalizing the Malays in South West Sarawak from the nation and *negeri* system. The root of the Malay's displacement, according to Ishikawa (1998), lied in the Brooke's policies which were aimed at weakening the Malay's political and economic power. As a result, the Malays had to rely on subsistence economy based on swidden cultivation while their leaders were reduced to being titular heads. Unfortunately, the marginalization and the displacement of the South West Sarawak Malays persisted even after Sarawak gained its independence. In fact, the state's marginalization of the Malays remained to haunt the community even after Malaysia became an industrialized nation. The work by Ishikawa (1998) is definitely important in enriching the limited literature on Muslim Bumiputera politics in Sarawak but some of